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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: FRENCH ON TURKISH PLAN FOR CYPRUS

REF: STATE 16987

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: France not only sees nothing new in the January 24 "Gul proposal," but considers it essentially as a step backward, according to MFA DAS-equivalents responsible for Cyprus in the EU and UN. In their view, Turkey is already obliged to fulfill its Ankara protocol commitments on opening ports/airports to Cypriot vessels, and is thus not in a position to demand concessions from Cyprus in return for doing so. They saw few prospects for progress until after the upcoming Greek Cypriot elections, at which time they hoped the EU would be able to unblock funds for Turkish Cypriots and the UN would re-engaged on the Cyprus issue. They claimed that all sides were more or less at a loss as to how to move things forward. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) Poloff delivered reftel demarche to MFA DAS-equivalent for Southern Europe Marine de Carne on February 3. Deputy Polcouns and poloff met February 8 with de Carne and Jean-Hugues Simon-Michel, DAS-equivalent for UN political affairs, for an informed discussion of France's views.

3. (C) De Carne noted at the outset that the French found nothing new in the January 24 "Gul proposal;" it was the same as the plan that had been rejected by the May 30, 2004 referendum, with the difference that Turkey had subsequently signed the EU's Customs Union protocol, and now had an obligation to open its ports and airports to Cypriot ships and aircraft. To the extent that the Turks were now seeking Cypriot concessions in return for fulfilling their own obligations, the Gul proposal "seems like a step backwards. We had trouble considering it and explaining it to the Cypriots." France had thus made clear to Turkey that it was up to Turkey to take the first step, initially by implementing its Ankara Protocol obligations. Only then would France be willing to encourage Cyprus to do more.

4. (C) De Carne pointed to the remarks of FM Douste-Blazy, who during a press availability with FM Gul in Ankara on February 1, said that the UN remained the best framework within which to solve the Cyprus question, but that it was also necessary that Turkey progress "as rapidly as possible" on the path of normalizing its relations with Cyprus. De Carne echoed the FM in reminding us that the EU would evaluate Turkey's progress on implementation of the customs protocol later in the year. She repeated that Turkey must make a gesture, no matter how limited.

5. (C) DAS-equivalent for UN political affairs Simon-Michel underlined de Carne's points, noting that UNSYG Annan appeared to believe that the time was not yet ripe for a new round of negotiations. He also said it would be difficult to envision any real engagement until after the Cypriot elections, although he held out some hope that some progress might still be made by the end of the year. At the same time, he lamented that no one -- neither the UN, the UK, nor France -- had any good ideas for moving forward.

6. (C) Asked how willing Cyprus might be to play its "veto" card in the opening and/or closing of chapters in the early part of Turkey's EU accession negotiations, de Carne said she believed Cyprus would show patience and would not scupper talks on particular chapters for the present. She made clear, however, that the EU will scrutinize Turkey's performance on the customs union question.

7. (C) Comment: Given public skepticism in France with respect to eventual Turkish EU accession -- as manifested in the constitutional amendment requiring a popular referendum on Turkish membership, legislation on the Armenian genocide, and the pre-presidential election posturing of PM de Villepin and FM Douste-Blazy on the need for Turkish recognition of Cyprus -- it seems unlikely at this time that France will make any positive contributions to finding a solution on Turkey-Cyprus issues.

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